



S/S 13709

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

Attention *Mrs. Mullett*
Keep this study together.
HAB

September 10, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Follow-up Report on the TWA Incident

As you know, our efforts continue to obtain the release of the two Israeli passengers hijacked from the TWA aircraft on August 29. On September 2 we apprised the President of initial actions being taken with regard to this incident. In view of developments since then, we believe that a further brief status report to the White House would be helpful.

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Executive Secretary

Enclosure:

Follow-up Report

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BY S/S: CMS

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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DECLASSIFIED
PA/HO, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 22, 2004

FOLLOW-UP REPORT ON HIJACKED TWA AIRCRAFT

Since our last report to the President of September 2 on the TWA plane hijacking incident, we have continued our intensive efforts to obtain the release of the two remaining Israeli passengers held by the Syrian Government (SARG) by:

A. Maintaining close contacts with the Italians who represent our interests in Syria;

B. Transmitting messages to the Soviet Union requesting its assistance;

C. Convening several emergency sessions of the Special Committee of ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) as well as speaking to the Director General of IATA (International Air Transport Association), Knut Hammerskjold;

D. Informing the North Atlantic Council of the facts in the case and urging that NATO countries do everything possible to support our efforts;

E. Contacting the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as the World Health Organization for which one of the Israeli detainees reportedly was working, and which is active in Syria;

F. Working closely with TWA;

G. Advising Israelis to exercise restraint and allow

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time for current efforts to be played out, which they have thus far agreed to do;

H. Instructing Ambassador Yost to ask U Thant for his assistance;

I. Soundings of third countries about the possibility of an aviation boycott against Syria.

To date the following results have been obtained:

1. The Italian Ambassador met with the Syrian Foreign Minister on September 6 and is hopeful as a result of his talk that the two Israelis will be released soon if a suitable psychological climate can be established.

2. The Soviets have relayed word from the Syrians that the matter of the passenger release is not "closed".

3. The Syrian Government has replied to an ICAO message of September 5 and stated that Article 11 of the Tokyo convention has been implemented in connection with the TWA hijacking.* Because of the unsatisfactory Syrian reply, another emergency meeting of the Committee was convened on September 8. A majority of the Committee members declined, however, to approve a follow-up to the Syrian message because they felt that this was becoming a "political" issue. At the strong urging of the U.S., the head of the ICAO has now agreed to send a follow-up message on his own.

4. An international Red Cross representative reported on September 9 that he had seen the Israeli men, who were well and being detained in what appeared to be a military medical installation. He did not believe the men would be released, however, without some quid pro quo from the Israelis.

5. U Thant has met with international pilots representatives and following this meeting stated that he had appealed to the Syrians.

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6. At our urging the Director General of the IATA has accepted a Syrian suggestion that he might wish to visit Damascus and has proposed a visit later this week.

7. Initial soundings with a number of concerned countries regarding the possibility of boycotting Syrian airlines and its airport have evoked lukewarm responses.

8. Pursuant to an Italian suggestion, we have urged that, if it is feasible, Pan American should inform the Syrians of its willingness to move toward final negotiations on overflight and landing rights--indicating, however, that prior release of the two passengers would be essential.

In the meantime, we are still weighing the possibility of requesting governments which have been invited to attend inauguration ceremonies of Damascus airport on September 15 not to accept these invitations. Because of the risks that this course of action would be counterproductive, we have held it in abeyance. Instead, we have suggested to the French Government, which has easy access to the Syrian regime, to consider sending word to Damascus that its attendance at the inauguration would be facilitated if the two Israeli passengers were released in advance.

Finally, we still continue to have available a contingency plan to move into the United Nations Security Council if all else fails. We are still most reluctant, however, to resort to this measure before exhausting all of the above courses of action.

The current belief by several experienced observers, including the Italian Ambassador in Damascus, is that the Syrians are aware of their international image and desire to abide by international aviation standards. While the regime wishes to move in the right direction, it apparently needs the right psychological climate. This means, among other things, dampening international furor over "Syrian piracy". Keeping the above in mind, therefore, we intend

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to move deliberately but persistently to obtain the release of these two men.

In this regard, it increasingly appears that the Syrians may be prepared to exchange the two Israelis for two Syrian pilots now held by Israel after the latter had landed by mistake in Israel. Thus far, the Israelis have vehemently opposed any suggestions of a deal. We have nevertheless informally broached to the Israelis the possibility of their quietly releasing the Syrians in Europe without tying it to the hijacked Israelis. In this informal way, Syria would almost certainly respond by releasing the two passengers. The Israelis have not yet reacted to our idea.

NEA/ARN:TJSnotes:gvl 9/9/69
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Clearances:
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NEA/ARN - Mr. Seelye
J - Mr. U. Alexis Johnson
E - Mr. Frank Loy

* Article 11 of the 1963 Tokyo Convention requires the immediate release by member states of hijacked aircraft, crews and passengers landing on their territory. The U.S. has ratified this convention which comes into effect on December 4, 1969. Syria has not yet done so.

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